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Security Council

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Provisional

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Thursday, 21 March 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Bliss
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Ms. Jiang Hua
	France	Mr. Briens
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Bouchaara
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Rwanda	Mr. Kayinamura
	Togo	Mr. Kandangha-Bariki
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Second report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2061 (2012) (S/2013/154)

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13-26635 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Second report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2061 (2012) (S/2013/154)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Iraq to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2013/154, which contains the second report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2061 (2012).

I now give the floor to Mr. Kobler.

Mr. Kobler: At the outset, let me take this opportunity to wish happy Nowruz to all those who celebrate on 21 March.

I am honoured to present to the Council today the second report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/154) pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2061 (2012), on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I shall also brief Council members on the most recent developments in Iraq.

I would like to begin by describing two significant and contrasting events that recently took place in Iraq. On 27 February, Iraqi Airways flight number 157 landed at Kuwait International Airport. That historic flight was the first after the 22-year halt in commercial air traffic between Iraq and Kuwait. That event affirmed the strong desire of the leaders of Iraq and Kuwait to open a new chapter in their relations, which have been heavily burdened by history.

However, a few days later, on 4 March, more than 40 Syrian soldiers and 10 Iraqis were killed inside Iraqi territory. This week, a series of atrocious terrorist attacks added more innocent persons to the long list of victims of such attacks. My condolences go the families of the victims and to the people of Iraq.

Those incidents demonstrate how Iraqis face a complex set of interrelated problems, among them the very real potential for a spillover of violence from Syria. Such destabilization would add to and fuel the existing political and security challenges facing Iraq, which threaten the achievements of the past decade.

Since late December, tens of thousands of demonstrators in Iraq's western provinces have taken to the streets to voice their grievances. Their demands are centred around issues of human rights and access to basic services. They feel unprotected, insecure and excluded.

My colleagues and I witnessed that firsthand in Ramadi, Samarra, Mosul, Fallujah, Tikrit and Kirkuk. Around the country, we listened to the demonstrators' frustrations. Over time, they spoke more harshly and proposed more radical solutions.

The volatility on the streets is also reflected at the political level. The ministers of the Al-Iraqiya Sunni bloc continue their boycott of Cabinet meetings, which has lasted for almost three months. Political coalitions are weakening. In essence, the political fabric is fraying.

The Government has taken a number of initiatives to address the demands of the demonstrators. I have welcomed those efforts, which have yielded some results.

One such initiative was the establishment of a committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani. The committee has reported that it has facilitated the release of approximately 3,400 prisoners. In addition, all female prisoners have been transferred to their home governorates, where they will serve the remainder of their sentences. Those measures are in direct response to the demands of the demonstrators.

The committee has also reinstated pension payments for 11,000 public-sector retirees who were members of the former Baath regime. Combined with decisions on other issues, the al-Shahristani committee claims that its decisions have covered roughly 100,000 individuals.

A second committee, under the chairmanship of the head of the National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, is

focused on finding common language for three pieces of highly contentious legislation, naemly, the law on counter-terrorism, the accountability and justice law, and a new general amnesty law. In that regard, tangible results still have to be achieved.

Since the onset of demonstrations, I have sought to advance inclusive and direct political dialogue and national reconciliation. I have offered our good offices, first as a means of relaying information between the demonstrators and the Government. I have expressed our approach as follows.

First, UNAMI is an impartial actor. We keep an equal distance from all sides. We offer our good offices, whether for mediation, convening, or witnessing, any negotiated agreement. However, secondly, UNAMI is not neutral on human rights. We have spoken up against the increasing use of sectarian language. We have advocated the principle of non-violence, including to the demonstrators. We have called on the Government to exercise the utmost restraint. Thirdly, UNAMI urges the Government to respond to those popular demands that can be addressed in the short term, and to do so immediately. Other demands will require more time for a response. The demonstrations have been under way for nearly three months. However, the mistrust among the components of Iraq — Shia, Sunni and Kurd and other communities — goes much deeper. The deep-seated lack of trust threatens the political fabric and the social bonds that should bring Iraqis together in one united, federal country on the basis of the Constitution.

Members of each and every ethnic and social group continue to be the target of acts of terrorism, assassination and kidnapping, including while practicing their faith. Terrorists seek to ignite sectarian conflict and turn the clock back on Iraq's nascent stability.

In total, acts of terrorism from November 2012 to the end of February 2013 claimed the lives of almost 1,300 civilians. More than 3,000 innocent Iraqis have been wounded. Furthermore, almost 600 Iraqi security forces have been killed and 1,000 injured as a result of those atrocious terrorist acts. I have condemned those acts in the strongest possible terms. I have called on all of Iraq's leaders and religious authorities to rise as one to stop the bloodshed.

Relations between the central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government continue to be strained. Kirkuk remains the flashpoint for Arab-Kurdish relations. On 16 January, for example, a series of attacks resulted in 26 deaths and the wounding of 190 other individuals.

The absence of President Talabani, who has had a truly stabilizing role in Iraq, is bitterly felt. I wish him a speedy recovery.

I strongly encourage talks to continue between the Iraqi army and the Peshmerga on the withdrawal and relocation of troops.

To bring about fruitful relations between the central and regional Governments, the passage of the revenue-sharing and hydrocarbon laws will be crucial. I call on the Parliament and the political blocs to reach a consensus on those laws without further delay. I wish to renew my offer of good offices to the parties, and call upon their goodwill. The sharing of the immense natural resources of Iraq in a fair and equitable way is a must, and a prerequisite to rebuilding the trust. We will continue to build trust no matter how difficult it is.

Iraq is set to hold provincial council elections in less than one month from today. On 19 March, the Cabinet in Iraq decided that the council elections in the Ninewa and Anbar provinces would be postponed by six months, with reference to the deteriorating security conditions in those locations. I have expressed my concern about that decision, as the citizens of those provinces are looking forward to those elections with great hope.

As the Independent High Electoral Commission is continuing the technical preparations for the elections in all 14 provinces, I have called on the Government and Electoral Commission to ensure that elections can take place as scheduled in a peaceful and secure environment. I wish to commend the leadership of the High Electoral Commission, in particular, Chairman Sarbast Rasheed, as well as the dedicated commissioners and staff of the Commission and polling stations, for their excellent work. They are often subject to considerable pressure. Unfortunately, and despite our efforts, there has been no consensus on passing the law on holding elections in Kirkuk province.

Iraq is committed to strengthening its relations with its neighbours. By doing so, it aims to fully take up its rightful place in the Arab world, the region and the international community. I have mentioned the progress achieved towards the normalization of relations between Iraq and Kuwait, including through

Iraq's positive steps towards fulfilling its remaining obligations under Chapter VII of the Charter. A major milestone in that process will be the completion of boundary maintenance work. The finalization of the removal of obstacles along the border, in particular the three houses in Umm Qasr, is a necessary step. Understandably, that step is sensitive and politically difficult for Iraq. However, it must be done by 31 March.

I also urge the Government of Iraq to accept the funds set aside with the United Nations for the compensation of Iraqi farmers pursuant to resolution 899 (1994). I sincerely hope that progress in that area will lead to consensus on further outstanding issues, including the file on missing Kuwaiti nationals and property. During my most recent visit to Kuwait on 5 March, I sensed a spirit of optimism within the Kuwaiti leadership. Therefore, it is with much anticipation that I welcome the upcoming visit of Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Baghdad in the near future.

In December, I visited Saudi Arabia. I sensed the potential for relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia to be strengthened in a number of fields, including a prisoner exchange based on the agreement reached between the two sides — it would be a noble gesture if an agreement could be reached before the holy month of Ramadan; the opening of a border crossing between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with its 800 kilometre-long border; and the active and committed participation of both countries in a new regional initiative led by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) to combat sand and dust storms. I urge the two countries to build upon the recent visit of a high-level Iraqi delegation to Riyadh. The restoration of normal relations would benefit the two peoples, the two countries and the region.

More than a year has passed since UNAMI began its considerable efforts to facilitate the humanitarian transfer of the residents of Camp Ashraf to the temporary transit location of Camp Hurriya and their relocation to third countries. I wish to reiterate my best wishes today on the occasion of Nowruz, in particular to the residents of Camp Hurriya and Camp Ashraf.

The urgency of relocating residents outside of Iraq was underlined on 9 February, when an attack on Camp Hurriya killed eight residents and injured an additional 40 persons. The Secretary-General, I and others have condemned that attack in no uncertain terms. I have fully supported requests made at the highest levels of the Government of Iraq to improve security at Camp Hurriya. The Government remains responsible for the safety and security of the residents in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the United Nations on 25 December 2011. The Government has assured me that it will spare no effort in preventing further attacks.

We face two major problems. First, the only durable solution is to relocate the residents outside of Iraq. I visited Albania on 15 March for talks with Prime Minister Berisha. I welcome the decision by the Government of Albania to accept 210 residents as early as next month. I sincerely thank the Albanian Government for that humanitarian gesture. Albania is thus the first country to accept a large number of residents. I urge other Member States to take similar steps. Yet, despite additional offers being made, the residents of Camp Hurriya continue to boycott relocation interviews with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I join the Secretary-General in urging the residents to fully cooperate with UNHCR. Offers must be accepted.

Secondly, there are 100 residents remaining at Camp Ashraf who refuse to join the larger group at Camp Hurriya until the completion of property negotiations. I encourage both the Government of Iraq and the residents to constructively engage with one another to promptly resolve the matter. I urge the residents to designate lawyers for that purpose.

Finally, I also appeal to the camp leadership not to prevent residents who wish to leave the camp from doing so, to cooperate with the Iraqi authorities when it comes to medical treatment, and to abstain from aggressive behaviour against our United Nations monitors. United Nations monitors must be able to freely interact with the residents of Camp Hurriya.

I would like to thank Member States, in particular the United States, and the European Union for their financial contributions and their support for the efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution of the issue of Camp Ashraf and Camp Hurriya. I also wish, in the meantime, to recognize the hard work of 136 United Nations staff members, including 60 security personnel, who are actively working on the file.

Having spoken at length about the group of 3,200 members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq in Iraq, I would like to note that our far larger humanitarian effort is focused

on three groups: Syrian refugees, returnees from Syria and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Iraq currently hosts nearly 120,000 Syrian nationals who have fled to Iraq seeking safety and humanitarian assistance. Most of the Syrian refugee population is currently located in the Kurdistan region. An average of 800 individuals enters the country every day. UNHCR is leading the humanitarian country team in conducting a massive emergency operation to respond to the refugees' humanitarian needs. That operation will support the Government of Iraq in ensuring that the refugees are protected and assisted.

I would like to commend the Government of Iraq for the generosity and hospitality it has shown to the individuals and families seeking safety and security in Iraq. I call on the Government to extend its generosity by reopening the Al-Qaim and Rabia border crossing points. I also appeal to all Member States to urgently step up their contributions to the refugee response plan, which still requires funding beyond June 2013.

In addition, approximately 80,000 Iraqis have fled Syria to return to Iraq in the past few months. They fall into the larger group of 1.2 million internally displaced persons. Both returnees and IDPs are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The majority of those persons live in informal settlements and constantly face the threat of eviction. Those settlements are in appalling condition. Returnees and the displaced lack access to basic services, proper public health facilities and schools. I call on the Government to increase the amount and speed of delivery of assistance it provides to Iraqi returnees from Syria. I also call on the Government to ensure the swift reintegration of Iraqi returnees.

I would like to turn now to the broader human rights situation in Iraq, and specifically the administration of justice. That is an area that continues to be of concern. Many detainees continue to complain of abuse, mistreatment and torture, in particular in prisons under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Every case of torture is one case too many. Confessions under duress are unacceptable. Courts continue to be underresourced, which causes long delays in processing cases, often beyond lawful limits. I wish to reiterate the Secretary-General's call on Iraq to consider a moratorium on all executions in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions. Respect for the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities also remains inconsistent. Those groups face discrimination and other social, cultural and legal barriers to their full participation in the economic, social and political life of Iraq.

Despite the problems noted, Iraq is making progress in establishing the High Commission for Human Rights, with the active support of the Government of Iraq and the assistance of the United Nations. The Commission will serve as a cornerstone of an Iraqi-owned and -led system to guarantee the protection, respect and promotion of the human rights of all of Iraq's citizens in future.

On matters related to the environment, dust storms have increasingly become a major problem for the Iraqi people and the region. The dust storms in the region are mainly generated in Iraq. From airports to agricultural lands, dust storms extract a heavy annual economic toll amounting to billions. Dust storms also place significant strain on public health. Hospitals are overwhelmed with persons requiring treatment for respiratory conditions caused by dust.

Last month, I joined the environment ministers of regional Governments at a meeting in Nairobi hosted by UNEP. We established a clear political agreement on the need to address the issue of sand and dust storms. UNEP will lead in the creation of a regional programme, in partnership with Governments, the private sector and civil society. A trust fund has been established for that effort, and I appeal to Member States, especially those affected by dust storms in the region, to contribute resources.

I also welcome the initiative of the Government of the United Arab Emirates to host the next regional meeting to discuss further concrete steps.

As in all my previous briefings to the Council, I would like to conclude by touching on the urgent problems facing the youth of Iraq. After the devastating effect of war, and caught amid a soaring political crisis, Iraq's youth are largely left to fend for themselves. Youth unemployment stands at 23 per cent.

I have made young people a priority because, with their potential and passion, they are the future of Iraq. They will carry forward efforts towards the stability, security and prosperity that all Iraqis seek to build. I very much welcome the Government's efforts to work towards a youth agenda. With the support of the United Nations Population Fund, a national youth strategy will be launched in the second quarter of 2013.

In February, I visited three different holy places in Baghdad with 30 young Iraqis of different faiths and backgrounds. Together we sat in shrines, churches and temples in order to discuss what unites us, along with our differences. I saw first-hand that reconciliation in Iraq can truly begin with the young.

UNAMI will continue to provide a platform for young people to express themselves, be empowered and vocalize the actions that will build their country.

In closing, I am reminded that the Iraqi people are blessed with three important assets: a rich and ancient culture; a vibrant young population; and natural wealth. I hope that Iraq will remain determined and steadfast in this very challenging time and take advantage of this rich endowment to further advance the country.

With the support of Member States, UNAMI will continue to assist the people and the Government of Iraq in its mandated tasks. I wish to thank the Government of Iraq for its cooperation during 2013, as in previous years.

I wish to place on record my deep thanks to the Security Council for its continued support.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Kobler for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you and your country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to extend my thanks to the previous President of the Security Council, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, for his efforts during the month of February. I also would like to thank Mr. Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, and his team in Baghdad and New York for their commitment, dedication and tireless efforts to assist the Government and the people of Iraq.

Since we are celebrating the day of Nawrooz, I would like to congratulate our Kurdish people in Iraq, who are celebrating the year 2713, and the Assyrian Christian Iraqis, who are celebrating the year 6763. I convey my best wishes to all nations that celebrate Nawrooz. As Mr. Kobler mentioned, we have a very ancient culture, which is obvious from the year being celebrated by the Assyrian community — around 7,000 years.

Having reviewed the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2013/154), I would like to make the following comments.

At the political and security levels, Iraq is witnessing a political stalemate and an exchange of accusations among some of the political blocs, while protests are continuing in a number of cities that are making a number of legitimate demands. The most notable demands are for the adoption of the general amnesty law, the abolition of the Justice and Accountability Law, which replaced the de-baathification law, and the release of detainees, especially women. Other demands were added later, such as abolishing the Constitution and toppling the Government. The preliminary objectives of the demonstrations deviated from the path of popular demand when the demonstrators were infiltrated by certain extremist groups aiming to stir up sectarian tensions and foment civil war.

The foreign and regional players that hijacked the legitimate demands of citizens were exposed when the flag of the Free Syrian Army and portraits of foreign officers were displayed during the demonstrations. Proof of that is the support of Al-Qaida terrorist groups and the leadership of the Baath party. Izzat al-Douri, who was Vice-President during the Saddam regime, appeared on television for the first time since 2003 to announce his support for the demonstrations.

The Iraqi Government declared that the demands of the protesters should be considered and that it differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate demands based on the Constitution. Continuous governmental and parliamentarian efforts are therefore under way to respond to those demands.

On 9 January 2013, the Iraqi Council of Ministers decided to form a ministerial-level committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Al-Shahristani, and the membership of the ministries of justice, defence, human rights, municipalities and water resources, as well as the State Minister for Parliamentarian Affairs and the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, in addition to the Deputy Minister of the Interior, to receive the legitimate demands of the demonstrators through delegations representing them.

The committee was commissioned to study the demands and to make its recommendations to the Council of Ministers. Upon the recommendations of the committee, the Council of Ministers approved

the following actions: extending the deadline for those subject to the Justice and Accountability Law to submit requests for a return to service or retirement; processing pension applications for all persons subjects to the Justice and Accountability Law, except Fedayeen Saddam, Saddam commandos and members of the highest two ranks of the Baath party; authorizing the real estate registration department to accept applications to lift the freeze on the properties of officials of the former regime; activating item 12 of the Justice and Accountability Law by giving orders to ministries to accept applications for exemptions to that law in order to submit them to the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives for approval; requesting the High Judicial Council to authorize judges to activate the legal process for detained women in order to facilitate their release, except in cases where prohibited by law; requesting the Ministry of Justice to immediately implement release orders, and not to wait for the approval of any other authority.

On 29 January, the Council of Ministers approved the increase in the salaries of the members of the Awakening Councils, who are mostly in the western part of Iraq, to at least 500,000 Iraqi dinars a month, authorizing the Ministry of Defence to give bonuses to interrogation officers to speed up the process of releasing the detainees. Those executive procedures led to the realization of the legitimate demands of the demonstrators, including the release of around 5,500 detainees — though I would note that Mr. Kobler said 3,500 — including most of the women; the return to service of hundreds of officers from the former Iraqi army; the completion of more than 91,000 pension applications; and the lifting of the ban on 1,800 properties that belong to members of the former Baath regime.

With regard to sectarian slogans and calls to cancel the Constitution, the Ministry of the Interior has warned that the language of sectarian incitement is considered a direct threat to the security of the nation and its people. Such language lays the foundation for a culture of hatred and the rejection of others and promotes sectarianism under the pretext of defending the rights of a certain sect. Such language, together with sectarian motives, is also responsible for the indiscriminate violence. The Ministry has pointed out that it is condemned by the Iraqi Constitution and completely contradicts the current regulations and laws. It has warned citizens not to listen to the advocates of sectarian strife. The Ministry has also said that, on the basis of its executive responsibility, it will decisively address such attempts to destroy the unity of the county and act against such voices, in line with its mandate under the law and the Constitution, regardless of their title, social, religious or political positions.

Despite that worrying situation, most demonstrations are still peaceful, as witnessed by UNAMI during its visit to Al-Anbar province in February. Like many countries that have emerged from a dictatorship, Iraq is going through a democratic transition phase that will be characterized by instability until the democratic institutions gain strength and competitive political work runs smoothly and peacefully within the framework of the Constitution.

Over the past years, Iraq suffered several crises that finally led to a peaceful solution and positive results, such as the adoption of the Constitution, the holding of elections, the formation of the Government and the adoption of budgets. Such crises and other examples polarized the Iraqi political currents and led to long-lasting tensions. However, they ultimately followed their course and did not hinder the political process indefinitely. In other words, the struggle in Iraq moved from an armed conflict to gain power to a peaceful conflict within the framework of the Constitution and the law, as I have described in the past by saying that Iraqis have learned to shout rather than to shoot at each other.

The Prime Minister has explained his view of current events in the region and their impact on the internal situation in Iraq by stressing the adherence of Iraqis to their unity and their rejection of violence, extremism and sectarianism. We have warned several times against the spillover of the Syrian conflict, which could cause instability in the whole region. That has been echoed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, when, on several occasions, he has warned about the repercussions of the Syrian conflict on neighbouring countries.

The killing of Syrian soldiers after they had surrendered to the Iraqi authorities by armed terrorists, who crossed from Syria to Al-Anbar province on 4 March, is the best proof of a link between the armed groups across the border and the impact of the Syrian conflict on the stability of the region. The Al-Qaida terrorist group announced its responsibility for the

murder of those soldiers in collaboration with the Al-Nusra Front terrorist group in Syria.

Some areas inside Iraq are still witnessing acts of violence, while others are enjoying a good level of security. Iraqi citizens are still subject to violence from terrorism, but less so than in 2011 and certainly less than the peak of sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007. There is a fear of the possibility of an increase in violence in the next few months as a result of the regional situation and if the current political crisis is not resolved.

Although the Iraqi security forces are combating terrorist activities, many rebel groups, including Al-Qaida, are still active in parts of Iraq. The situation is still critical in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah ad-Din, Al-Anbar and other provinces. The Iraqi Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, condemned the attack on Camp Liberty on 9 February. It immediately launched an investigation to find out the perpetrators and bring them to justice and to reaffirm its resolve to take the necessary measurements to ensure the security and safety of the inhabitants of the camp.

Other committees, including the Al-Ja'afari committee, which was responsible for some political dialogue, are still conducting talks with all political groups in order to try and solve the problems between all factions and to reach a consensus among Iraqi political groups and the coalition. One positive point in the political process is that the Independent High Electoral Commission has affirmed that it is moving forward with its timetable to hold the provincial council elections, which are scheduled for 20 April. The Commission is working despite the challenges to complete a special programme for the elections, in line with international standards, in collaboration with the International Electoral Assistance Team and UNAMI. The Commission finalized the approval of political entities and coalitions and has received the names of candidates in the provinces. The Commission is working on the last stage of completing the procedures for hiring polling-station employees and is finalizing all logistical matters and the printing of ballot papers.

At the economic level, Iraq has succeeded in curbing inflation, achieving economic growth and increasing its oil exports. Iraq has achieved significant progress in development, according to the recent World Bank report, entitled Country Partnership Strategy for Iraq 2013-2016.

In 2013, the Iraqi Government has focused on policies to support the private sector, to create job opportunities for its citizens and to stimulate economic development. As a result of Iraq's plan to increase its oil production, at the end of 2012, the country reached second place among oil-exporting countries of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, after Saudi Arabia, and now stands at its highest average in the past 30 years.

In 2012, the Iraqi economy grew by about 10 per cent for the second consecutive year. The International Monetary Fund expects the Iraqi economy to grow by 13.5 per cent in 2013, which would make it one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The Iraq Government is trying to diversify the economy and to create new job opportunities for Iraq's workforce.

The Government budget for 2013 amounts to approximately $118.3 billion, with an increase of 18 per cent compared to 2012. That makes it the largest budget in Iraq's history. The budget allocates 29.5 per cent to energy, 19.7 per cent to security, 17.7 per cent to social services, 12.8 per cent to education and 6.8 per cent to health care. The investment portion of this year's budget is approximately 40 per cent, which is larger than in any previous budget.

The thirty-ninth Baghdad International Fair was opened by the Prime Minister of Iraq in November 2012, with the participation of 1,440 foreign companies from all over the world. Bilateral agreements were signed with participating countries and companies aimed at expanding trade relations. In December 2012, Iraq ratified a framework agreement for trade and investment with the United States as a first step towards expanding trade and investment between the two countries.

The European Parliament has ratified a partnership and cooperation agreement between the Republic of Iraq and the European Union. In addition, Iraq's membership was accepted by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative on 12 December 2012 after it had completed all the necessary requirements and procedures. That step was part of Iraq's efforts to enhance the company working environment in the extractive industries.

Iraq is working to attract investment for reconstruction after years of neglect due to years of wars and sanctions. According to a report published in May 2012, foreign companies have invested more than $55 billion in investment projects, service contracts

and other activities throughout Iraq. Direct foreign investment reached about $2 billion from being almost nothing a decade ago. Such amounts do not include the tens of billions of dollars of investment in the energy sector.

Within the framework of infrastructure projects, $5 billion were allocated to building housing projects in all parts of Iraq according to the population percentage. Several projects have been inaugurated, including the Al Saedia project in Baghdad in late November 2012. The foundation was laid for the third Khaldon housing project for families of martyrs in Basra in mid-February. In Najaf, another project is under construction that contains 1,100 apartments. It will be supplied by clean electricity through solar panels and will include a medical clinic, schools and kindergartens.

With regard to adopting communication solutions and technology to support social and economic development, the percentage of cell phone users in Iraq has now reached 80 per cent, and will rise to 93 per cent in 2015. According to statements made available by four Internet and telephone service providers, more than 5 million Iraqis use the Internet, and Iraq has more than 25 million cell phone users.

At the regional and international levels, Iraq is continuing to develop its relations with all countries of the region, especially the State of Kuwait. Iraq is making efforts to support the moderate current in the region, encouraging dialogue and steering the region away from the danger of regional interventions.

With regared to the Kuwaiti issue, the dispute was ended and a final settlement reached on the matter of Iraqi Airways versus the State of Kuwait through the signing of an agreement between the two sides and Iraq's payment of $500 million. On 29 January, the Iraqi Council of Ministers ratified the draft law on the agreement concerning navigation in the Khor Abdallah waterway. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoyshar Zebari visited the State of Kuwait on 27 February aboard the first Iraqi Airways aeroplane to fly to Kuwait in 23 years. A joint technical team is currently working on the border pillars maintenance project. It expects to finish its work by the end of this month, bringing to a close one of the most important issues between the two countries. That would pave the way to bilateral relations based on mutual respect and common interests, as well as for Iraq's exit from its Chapter VII status.

In the context of Iraq's regaining its international status, with a view to building on the successful holding of several conferences in 2012, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki opened the twenty-ninth session of the Arab Council of Ministers of Housing and Construction in Baghdad on 18 December 2012.

That same month, Baghdad hosted a conference on Palestinian and Arab prisoners in Israeli prisons, with the participation of 70 countries. The conference concluded with the Baghdad declaration and recommended the acceptance of Iraq's proposal to establish a fund to support Palestinian and Arab prisoners and their families. The Government of Iraq made an initial $2 million contribution to the fund.

During its presidency of the League of Arab States Summit, Iraq proposed holding the first Arab conference on legal and national awareness, which was opened in Baghdad on 10 March. The aim was to develop and consolidate legal and national awareness of the concept of citizenship and an awareness that human rights will generate affiliation, interdependence and integration into the melting pot of society. Citizenship is a right of every citizen in society, regardless of racial, religious or sectarian affiliation. Violations of human rights open the door to wars.

At the international level, Iraq participated in the seventeenth Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was held in The Hague from 26 to 30 December 2012. Iraq was elected as a Vice-President of the Conference, as well as a member of the credentials committee. That affirmed Iraq's commitment to supporting international efforts to achieve a world free from chemical weapons and to ensure international peace and security.

Foreign Minister Zebari participated in the Munich Security Conference that opened on 1 February. The Conference discussed the most important international policy issues and security and economic problems at the regional and international levels, including their implications and ways to face them.

The Foreign Minister also participated in the ministerial-level meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, held in Moscow on 20 February.

The Prime Minister chaired the Iraqi delegation participating in the twelfth Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Cairo on 8 February.

Building on Iraq's role in efforts to resolve the Syrian problem peacefully and to support the humanitarian situation in that country, Iraq participated in the donors conference held in Kuwait. It is worth mentioning that Iraq is sheltering approximately 100,000 Syrian refugees, as Mr. Kobler mentioned, spread over the cities of Iraqi Kurdistan, Anbar province and other provinces. During her visit to New York, I asked Christine McNab, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, about the status of Syrian refugee camps in Iraq, and she answered that she had visited them and that they were good.

On 26 February, our Foreign Minister welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium to discuss the improvement of bilateral relations and cooperation in combating extremism and terrorism. The visit resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding on political and diplomatic cooperation between the ministries for foreign affairs of the our countries.

On 4 March, the Prime Minister welcomed his counterpart from the Arab Republic of Egypt. Both sides held talks to coordinate political positions and discussed cooperation and trade relations between the two countries at the regional level.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the importance of the support of the members of the Security Council in assisting Iraq in emerging from its Chapter VII status and from the sanctions that were imposed on it due to Saddam's crime of invading Kuwait, which forced the Security Council to adopt sanctions resolutions and to consider Iraq a threat to international peace and security. Iraq today is different from Iraq before 2003, as the Secretary-General stated in his report to the Security Council (S/2013/154). Iraq must regain the status it enjoyed before 1990.

Before I conclude my speech, I would like to mention a few points that Mr. Kobler addressed in his statement. I think that resuming relations with Saudi Arabia is a very important step forward, and the exchange of prisoners between Iraq and Saudi Arabia is opening the door to that, as is the opening of the borders, which is also a good step forward.

With regard to reopening the border checkpoints between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, we have had several problems in the past. The most recent one was when Syrian soldiers closed the borders after a fight started between the Syrian regular army and the Syrian Free Army, and Iraq wanted to send those soldiers back from a different checkpoint. So they took them from Mosul to Anbar to send them back to Syria, when they were ambushed and killed. All of them, almost 40 Syrian soldiers and 20 Iraqi soldiers, were killed.

On torture, the Constitution and the law in Iraq forbid torture. However, we do not deny that there are some police officers who are guilty of misconduct, as in any other country in the world. But many officers have been dismissed, and some of them were brought to justice and legal action was taken against them when cases of torture were proved.

I commend Mr. Kobler for his tireless efforts to resettle the inhabitants of Camp Ashraf and Camp Hurriya. I personally commend him for his efforts to convince Albania to accept 210 of them. That is a good start. I encourage other members of the Security Council to accept more camp residents. The only solution to the problem is to resettle these people in other countries.

With respect to the youth problem, I think that the Government realizes how important the problem in Iraq. I encourage the Government to have a plan. By way of example, the Iraqi Mission to the United Nations has trained Iraqi youth. We have Iraqis who have come from different parts of the world, some from as far away as Australia. I have also given internships to other students in order to encourage youth and provide them an opportunity for internships in order to have a better future. They are from different nationalities and from all over the world, but the majority of them are studying in American universities.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.